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Agritourism and Socialeconomic Potentials of Orchards: A case of Laro Yewa Land Ogun State Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explores the potential of developing agritourism through orchard management in the Ilaro Yewa Land region of southwestern Nigeria. Utilizing site-to-site observations and semi-structured questionnaires, the research investigates ten selected orchard plantations, focusing on five to ten prevalent fruit tree species within each plantation. Data was collected from 45 staff members involved in various aspects of the orchards. The findings indicate significant potential for orchards to stimulate agritourism, contributing positively to the local economy. Among the respondents, 97.8% agreed that orchards positively impact tourism, while only 2.2% disagreed. The study suggests that integrating agritourism with orchard management can provide additional income for local farmers, create educational opportunities for visitors, and promote sustainable agricultural practices. This approach supports cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability in the Ilaro Yewa Land region. The research concludes that agritourism, centered around orchard management, is viable and beneficial for enhancing the economic welfare of the local community and maintaining the ecological health of the region.

Keywords: Agritourism; Socioeconomic Development; Orchard Plantations; Ilaro Yewa Land, Sustainable Agriculture.

A. INTRODUCTION

Orchards are cultivated plots of land dedicated to growing fruit-bearing trees such as apples, oranges, mangoes, pears, and cherries, either for commercial or personal use. They are widespread globally and require specific conditions for optimal tree growth and fruit production, including suitable soil, water availability, and climate (Albu and Nicolau, 2011). Typically, farmers manage and maintain orchards, using various methods to regulate pests and diseases, prune trees, and harvest fruit. The fruit obtained from orchards can be sold fresh, processed into juice, canned, or dehydrated for future use. Integrating orchards with agritourism can create a symbiotic and environmentally sound opportunity for rural communities and agricultural enterprises.

Agritourism is the practice of inviting individuals to visit a farm or agricultural enterprise for enjoyment, education, or entertainment (Achoja, 2013). It offers orchard owners an additional source of income, generating revenue through activities such as guided tours, fruit harvesting, and on-site events, which complement conventional agricultural income. Providing opportunities like farm-to-table dinners, workshops, or seasonal festivals can appeal to a wide audience. Visitors can learn about fruit cultivation, harvesting processes, and agricultural life (Achoja, 2017). Consider incorporating educational elements such as guided tours, workshops, or demonstrations focusing on sustainable farming methods, organic agriculture, and biodiversity. Allowing tourists to personally select their own fruits is a popular agritourism activity (Chukwuji, 2001), offering a hands-on experience and promoting direct engagement between consumers and agricultural products. Clearly communicate instructions for fruit selection, pricing, and other relevant details to ensure a positive experience for visitors.

By integrating orchards with agritourism, we can create a unique and enjoyable experience for visitors while promoting the long-term sustainability of agricultural enterprises (Amalu, 2015). Orchards

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offer the opportunity to create ecologically functional landscapes on a significant scale while educating individuals, professionals, and organizations about sustainable green infrastructure. As educational institutions, orchards can influence urban green space design, recreation, and tourism planning (Honey, 2003). They provide a wide range of ecological and informal educational opportunities, healthful recreational options, and a means to escape metropolitan infrastructure.

The presence of a variety of plant and animal species is essential for the success of nature-based tourism, which is a key factor in the growth of ecotourism in a country (Olaniyi et al., 2020; Ogunjemite et al., 2021). Conservation of these resources at tourism destinations is crucial for all parties involved in renewable resource management. It is important to recognize that depletion of natural resources can have extensive repercussions, affecting the viability of nature-based tourism and ecosystem health. Practitioners of renewable resource management should actively engage in efforts to mitigate the adverse impacts of tourism activities on indigenous plant and animal species. Throughout history, orchards have significantly influenced our understanding and appreciation of the natural environment (Minter, 2014). They have advanced our understanding of plants and driven important societal transformations through diligent investigation and record-keeping of plant collections. Their contributions highlight the interdependence of ecosystems, emphasizing the need for conscientious and sustainable approaches in nature-based tourism management and promotion.

The growth of nature-based tourism is closely linked to the well-being of plants and animals, making it crucial for practitioners to emphasize conservation initiatives and sustainable resource management. Orchards have played a crucial role in promoting a greater understanding and appreciation of the natural world, as well as advocating for sustainable methods to ensure its long-term survival. Orchards serve as venues for community gatherings and cultural events, providing valuable knowledge accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds, from amateur gardeners to university-level experts (Davies et al., 2012). Botanical gardens serve as both leisure destinations and a means of connecting with the natural environment, assisting visitors in managing stress (Packer, 2013). Orchard-based tourism has the potential to enhance local employment and stimulate economic growth, significantly impacting tourism development by offering unique and engaging experiences for visitors, thus promoting the cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability of the area.

Therefore, the main aim of this study is to investigate the socioeconomic opportunities that can arise from using orchards to promote agritourism in the Ilaro Yewa Land region of Ogun State, Southwest Nigeria. The objective of this project is to evaluate the potential of combining agritourism with orchard management to produce supplementary revenue for local farmers, provide educational experiences for visitors, and encourage the adoption of sustainable agricultural methods. The study aims to assess the viability and advantages of agritourism in improving the economic welfare of the local community and maintaining the ecological health of the orchards. This will be achieved through on-site observations and semi-structured Questionnaire s with orchard personnel. The study also seeks to assess tourist views and the influence of orchards on tourism in order to have a thorough grasp of the possibilities for agritourism growth in the area.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted in Ilaro is a municipality situated in the Yewa South Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. It is positioned at coordinates 54 degrees north and 2 degrees 57 minutes east. It is located in the southwest region of the country. The town is renowned for its historical and cultural importance, and it functions as a prominent urban center in the Yewa region of Ogun state (Figure 1). The precipitation levels in Ilaro, similar to several other locations, exhibit variability contingent upon the

season and prevailing meteorological conditions. Ilaro is situated in Nigeria, where a tropical climate prevails, characterized by clearly defined rainy and dry seasons. The dry season in Ilaro typically spans from November to March. During this period, there is a notable decrease in rainfall, and there may be extended periods with minimal or no precipitation. The annual precipitation varies between 1800 and 3000 millimeters. The annual mean temperature in the nearby area is 26°C. The vegetation types in Ilaro can be diverse and are influenced by factors such as geography, climate, and human acitivy, deforestation and agricultural development have significantly affected the natural vegetation in various regions of Nigeria, including Ilaro (Fadipe et al., 2024).

The study employed a combination of site-to-site observations and questionnaire to gather comprehensive data. This multi-faceted approach is supported by previous research, such as Greengrass (2006) and Goodwin et al. (2017), which underscores the effectiveness of direct observations in capturing the ecological and operational dynamics of agricultural sites. The research was conducted across ten purposely selected orchard plantations situated within the natural Ilaro area in southwestern Nigeria (See table 1). These orchards were chosen based on their representativeness of the region's agricultural diversity. The systematic observation focused on identifying and cataloging five to ten prevalent fruit tree species in each plantation. Key physical features were also recorded, including the layout of the plantations, presence of buildings, fencing/demarcations, and other native trees.

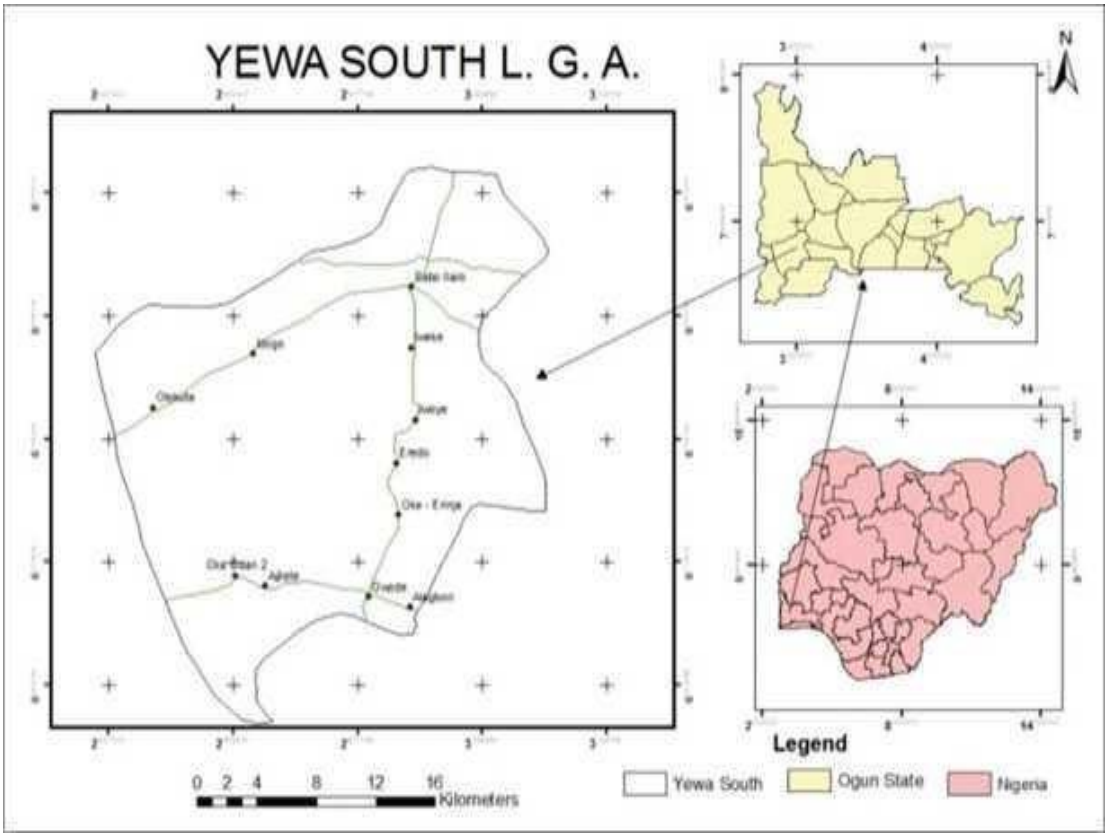

Figure 1: Map of the study area
Source: (Ogunyemi et al, 2014)

Table 1. Orchard Characteristics and Tourism Potentials in the Study Area

Location	Orchard Types	Orchard Characteristics	Tourism potentials
Agbada	Mixed plantations, with exotic and native fruit tree species	African oil palm[1] and Mixed oranges[2]	1.40 hectares, well lay out with loops, accommodation facility with more than 30 hotels, restaurant picnic area with public toilet and it is close to the Ilaro and Yewa river.
Semene	Mixed plantation with native fruit species	Bush mango[3], White star apple[4], and Africa pear[5]	20 acres, well maintained earth road, farmhouse, restaurant, accommodation close to Ilaro city, Avi tourism close Yewa river.
Gbokoto tuntun	Mixed plantations, with exotic and native fruit tree species	Mixed oranges [1], Avocado pear[6], and African pear[3]	30 acres, with well-maintained road infrastructure, loop is available for nature viewing, accommodation, picnic area close to Ilaro city.
Idogo	Mixed plantations, with exotic and native fruit tree species	Cashew[7] and Cocoa[8]	40 acres, accommodation, restaurants, loop available with well lay out, close to Yewa river.
Iwoye	Single crop Plantation	African oil palm[1]	10 acres, good loops, one hotel within the palm plantation, picnic area available, and loop close to Ilaro city.
Oke odan	Mixed plantations, with exotic and native fruit tree species	African oil Palm[1], Mixed oranges [2], and Cocoa[8]	10 acres, one hotel within the palm plantation, good roads, picnic area available, and loop present close to Ilaro city.
Ajilete	Mixed plantations, with exotic and native fruit tree species	Cocoa[8], Cashew[6] and Mango[9]	10 acres, good loops, one hotel within the palm plantation, picnic area available, good roads, loop present close to Ilaro.
Oguntedo	Mixed plantations, with exotic and native fruit tree species	Bush mango[3], White star apple[4], and Banana[10]	Well maintained earth road, farmhouse, restaurant, close Ilaro city, Avi tourism is available close Yewa river.
Illobi	Single crop Plantation	Oil palm[1]	60 hectares, good loops, one hotel within the palm estate, loop present close to Ilaro and reserve for nature viewing.
Akinde	Mixed plantations, with exotic and native fruit tree species	Mixed Oranges[2], Bush mango[3], and Cashew[6]	10 acres, good road, one hotel within the palm plantation, good restaurants, picnic area, loops present close to Ilaro city.

[1] *Elaesis guineensis*
[2] *Citrus spp – (Sweet orange, Grape, Tangelo Tangerine lime)*
[3] *Irvingia gabolensis*
[4] *Chrysophyllum albidum*
[5] *Dacroydes edulis*
[6] *Persea americana*
[7] *Anacardium ocidentale*
[8] *Theobroma cacao*
[9] *Mangifera indica*
[10] *Musa paradisiaca Linn*

Questionnaire was filled by 45 staff members who manage various aspects of the orchards. The data gather insights on the operational challenges and potentials of integrating agritourism with orchard management. The combination of observational data and questionnaire responses provided a nuanced understanding of the orchards' characteristics and their potential for agritourism development. The findings demonstrated that orchards have the potential to stimulate agricultural tourism, thereby enhancing the local economy.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n=45)

Gender	**Percentage (%)**
Male	53.3
Female	46.7
Age Range (years)	
18-30	55.6
31-43	-
44-56	31.1
57 and above	-
Marital Status	
Single	66.7
Married	33.3
Religion	
Christianity	62.2
Islam	33.3
Traditional Religion	4.4

Source: Author Own Elaboration (2024)

The staff demographic research revealed that 53% of the staff were males, while 46.7% were females, as shown in Table 2. The age distribution of the workforce shows that the biggest percentage, 55.6%, falls within the 18-30 year range. Following that, the age distribution between 41-56 years is the next highest. The respondents' marital status is as follows: 68.7% are single, which is the largest percentage, and 33.3% are married. The data on religious affiliation of the respondents indicates that Christianity has the biggest percentage at 63.2%, followed by Islam at 33.3%, and traditional religion at the lowest percentage of 4.4%.

C. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The study identified distinct characteristics and tourism potentials for each orchard location, as summarized in Table 3. Most orchards featured well-maintained loops, accommodation facilities, picnic areas, and were located near Ilaro city, which hosts over 30 hotels. Good roads and amenities such as restrooms and restaurants further enhanced their suitability for tourism. The study sites exhibit distinct characteristics and possess significant tourism potential, indicating that the area is highly suitable for the development of agricultural tourism. Several orchards comprised a mix of exotic and native fruit tree species, enhancing both the agricultural output and the aesthetic and ecological appeal for tourists.

The findings from the study conducted in the Ilaro Yewa Land orchards in Ogun State, Southwest Nigeria, reveal significant insights into the potential of these orchards to drive agritourism and contribute to the socioeconomic development of the region. The study identified that the orchards possess distinctive and abundant qualities that could boost tourism, with 66.7% of workers agreeing to this statement. This

finding underscores the unique attributes of the orchards, such as their mix of exotic and native fruit tree species, which not only enhance the aesthetic appeal but also provide ecological benefits that are attractive to tourists.

Table 3. Steps and Examples in Researching Regenerative Tourism

Aspect	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
Distinctive and abundant qualities of orchards	66.7	33.3
Potential to stimulate tourism	68.9	31.1
Profitability of developing orchards	64.4	35.6
Fulfillment of cultural requirements	46.7	53.3
Efficacy of orchard species in ethnomedicine	68.9	31.1
Suitability for research and education	77.8	22.2
Impact on social life	40	60
Impact on local economy	77.8	22.2
Influence on tourist satisfaction	62.2	37.8

Source: Author Own Elaboration (2024)

The potential of the orchards to stimulate tourism was affirmed by 68.9% of the respondents. This indicates a strong belief among the workers that the orchards can attract tourists, contributing to the local tourism industry. The presence of well-maintained facilities, good roads, and amenities like restrooms and restaurants further supports this potential, making the orchards accessible and comfortable for visitors. A significant majority of 64.4% of respondents agreed that developing orchards is profitable. This highlights the economic viability of investing in orchard development for agritourism. The profitability is likely driven by the diversified agricultural output from mixed plantations, which not only supports local economies but also provides additional income streams through tourism activities.

The findings regarding cultural needs were mixed, with 46.7% agree that orchards fulfill their cultural requirements. This suggests that while orchards have some cultural relevance, there is room for improvement in integrating cultural elements into agritourism activities. On the other hand, the efficacy of orchard species in ethnomedicine was recognized by a majority of respondents (%), indicating the potential for orchards to preserve and promote traditional medicinal practices.

The suitability of orchards for research and education was strongly supported, with 77.8% of respondents agree. This underscores the role of orchards as living laboratories where sustainable agricultural practices and biodiversity can be studied. Educational programs centered around these aspects can attract students, researchers, and tourists interested in learning about agriculture and environmental conservation. The impact of orchards on social life and the local economy was highlighted by the respondents. A significant portion (77.8%) agreed that orchards positively impact the local economy, while 40% agreed that they enhance social life. These findings indicate that orchards not only provide economic benefits through tourism and agriculture but also foster social cohesion by involving the community in tourism activities. The quality of facilities and the diversity of fruit tree species were seen as key factors influencing tourist satisfaction, with 62.2% of respondents agreeing. This emphasizes the importance of maintaining high standards in infrastructure and continually introducing new, attractive fruit tree species to keep the tourism experience fresh and engaging.

Comparing these findings with previous studies by Greengrass (2006) and Goodwin et al. (2017), the current study aligns with the established understanding that site-to-site observation and mixed methodologies are effective in evaluating the tourism potential of agricultural sites. Previous research has also highlighted the importance of biodiversity and well-maintained facilities in attracting tourists, which is corroborated by the current study. The study's findings underscore the potential of orchards in Ilaro Yewa Land to serve as significant drivers of agritourism, thereby contributing to the socioeconomic development of the region. The data collected through site-to-site observations and semi-structured Questionnaire s provided a robust foundation for understanding the diverse characteristics and tourism potentials of the orchards. The presence of well-maintained roads, loops, accommodation, and other amenities is crucial for attracting tourists. These facilities not only enhance the visitor experience but also ensure that the orchards are accessible and comfortable for tourism activities. This aligns with previous studies, such as those by Sachaleli (2022), which highlight the importance of infrastructure in agritourism development. The diversity of fruit tree species in the mixed plantations adds to the ecological and aesthetic appeal of the orchards. This diversity can attract nature enthusiasts and provide educational opportunities related to sustainable agriculture and biodiversity. These findings are consistent with the work of Weyland (2021), who emphasized the role of biodiversity in enhancing agritourism experiences. While a significant portion of respondents felt that orchards do not fully meet their cultural needs, the potential for ethnomedicine suggests that orchards could play a role in preserving traditional knowledge and practices. Integrating cultural elements and traditional medicinal practices into agritourism activities could enhance the cultural relevance of the orchards. This is supported by the findings of Tang and Xu (2023), who discussed the integration of cultural heritage into agritourism.

The positive impact of orchards on the local economy and social life highlights their potential as tools for community development. Agritourism can provide additional income for farmers, create jobs, and promote social cohesion through community involvement in tourism activities. These benefits are well-documented in the literature, such as in the studies by Sznajder et al. (2009), who explored the economic and social impacts of agritourism. The suitability of orchards for research and education underscores their role as living laboratories for studying sustainable agricultural practices, biodiversity, and the ecological impact of fruit tree cultivation. Educational programs can attract students, researchers, and tourists interested in learning about agriculture and environmental conservation. This is in line with the findings of Fanelli and Romagnoli (2020), who highlighted the educational benefits of agritourism. Ensuring high-quality facilities and a diverse range of fruit tree species is essential for enhancing tourist satisfaction. This can be achieved through continuous improvement of infrastructure and the introduction of new, attractive fruit tree species. These factors are critical for the success of agritourism, as noted by Andayani et al. (2021) who identified facility quality and product diversity as key determinants of tourist satisfaction in agritourism settings.

D. CONCLUSION

The findings of this research study indicate that orchards have the potential to be an appealing and captivating tourist destination, providing visitors with a unique blend of natural, agricultural, and cultural encounters. The range of tourism activities and amenities available in an orchard would differ based on the geographical location and the preferences of the guests. Orchards provide guided tours that educate guests about the varieties of fruits cultivated, the cultivation techniques employed, and the orchard's historical background. Visitors might have a valuable educational experience while also discovering that orchards are frequently situated in picturesque rural locations. Tourists may choose to visit orchards to appreciate the natural beauty, capture images, and take leisurely stroll amidst the fruit trees.

These opportunities not only serve the needs of the local population but also attract tourists, providing them with distinctive experiences in orchards. The integration of agritourism with orchard management in Ilaro Yewa Land offers significant potential for enhancing the socioeconomic well-being of the local population. By leveraging the unique characteristics and biodiversity of the orchards, the region can attract a diverse range of tourists, provide educational and research opportunities, and promote cultural and economic sustainability.

Based on the data, the researchers have formulated the following recommendations. Given the orchards' significant contributions to both the tourism sector and society, it is imperative that they are not completely abandoned. Expanding the number of orchards will contribute to economic empowerment in society and should therefore be revitalized to encourage sustainable tourism development. The local community should be encouraged to participate in the orchard industry, since this will stimulate employment and provide a sustainable source of revenue, while also fostering cultural and social integration. This would facilitate the seamless continuation of the endeavors initiated by previous leaders, as it will contribute to the progress of rural regions, thereby fostering the growth of ecotourism. The government at various levels has implemented policies aimed at promoting tourism by establishing distinctive orchard farms that utilize indigenous fruit tree species from all ethnic groupings in Nigeria. The diverse tribes in Nigeria, especially the Yewa people, should promote and exhibit their unique frit tree species through local and worldwide television and radio platforms to raise awareness. Future efforts should focus on improving infrastructure, diversifying agricultural outputs, and integrating cultural and traditional elements into agritourism activities to maximize the benefits for the local community.

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